

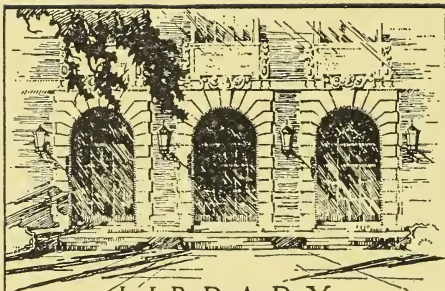
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ST. CLAIR'S DEFEAT

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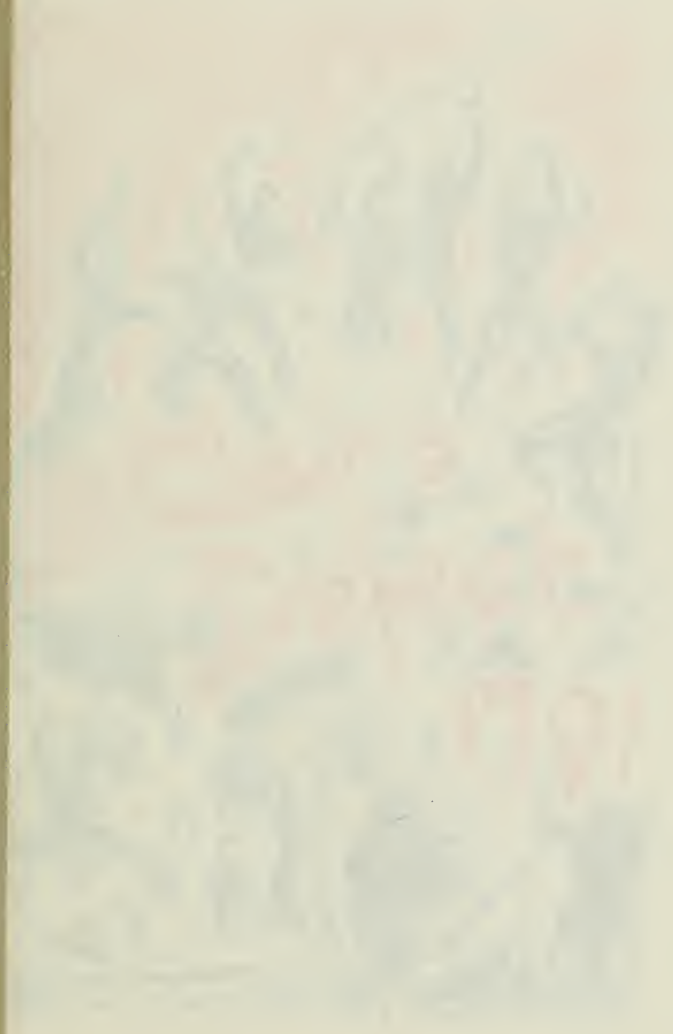



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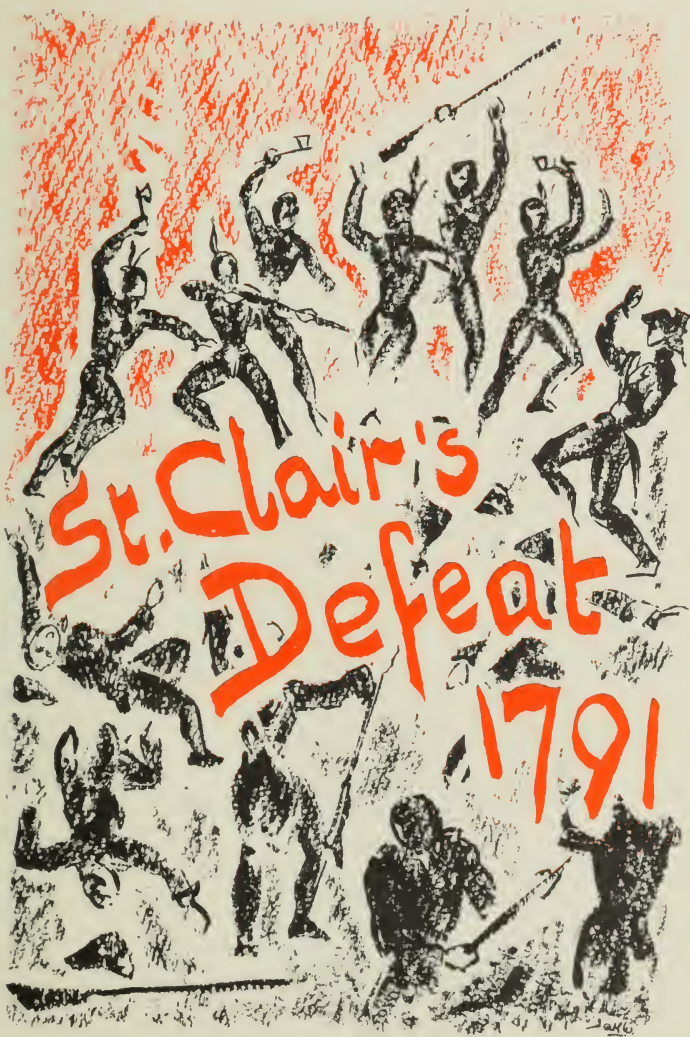
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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY





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St. Clair's Defeat 1791

ST. CLAIR'S DEFEAT

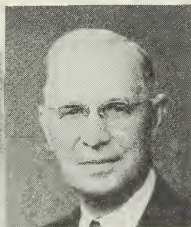


Prepared by the Staff of the
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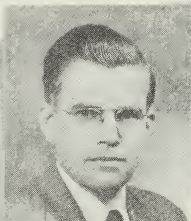
One of a historical series, this pamphlet is published under the direction of the governing Boards of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County.

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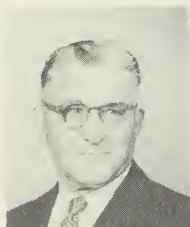
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FOREWORD

Several survivors of St. Clair's Defeat wrote vivid accounts of their experiences during that terrible battle. These personal reports detail one of the worst defeats ever suffered by an American army. Encouraged by victories over the forces of Generals Harmar and St. Clair, the Indians preyed upon the defenseless frontier. Therefore, the success of General Wayne's expedition, undertaken in 1792 to subdue the redskins, was of primary importance to the development of the West.

075-1
The first of the three articles in this pamphlet contains the accounts which Henry Howe included in his HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF OHIO, first published in 1847. Sources of quotations used in Howe's COLLECTIONS are not always clear, but the material is considered of sufficient historical significance to warrant reprinting without exact citations. The second item appeared in the INDIANA HERALD on April 13, 1864. The third article is a brief newspaper report which was published in the INDIANA STATE JOURNAL on September 27, 1851.

The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County present this publication in the hope that it will prove interesting to the general public as well as to students of the history of the Old Northwest. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation have been changed to conform to current usage.

The great objective of St. Clair's campaign was to establish a military post at the Miami village (the site of the present city of Fort Wayne) at the junction of the St. Mary's and St. Joseph rivers. Intermediate posts of communication were to be maintained from that place to Fort Washington at Cincinnati. This was felt to be the only way to prevent future hostilities.

Acting under instructions, St. Clair proceeded to organize his army. At the close of April, 1791, he was at Pittsburgh where troops and munitions of war were being collected. On the fifteenth of May he reached Fort Washington. The expedition was expected to start before the first of August, but mismanagement in the quartermaster's department and other hindrances prevented the departure for many weeks. From Fort Washington the troops advanced only six miles to Ludlow's Station. The army of 2,300, exclusive of the militia, remained there until September 17, when it moved forward and built Fort Hamilton on the Great Miami River. From there the army marched forty-four miles farther and built Fort Jefferson. On the twenty-fourth of October the toilsome march through the wilderness began. We copy below from the NOTES ON THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE NORTH-WESTERN TERRITORY by Judge Jacob Burnet.

"During this time 300 militiamen deserted and returned to their homes. The supplies for the army were still in the rear, and General St. Clair was afraid that the deserters might seize them for their own use. He decided very reluctantly to send the first regiment back for the dual purpose of bringing up the provisions and, if possible, of overtaking and arresting some of the deserters.

"After that arrangement had been made, the army resumed its march; and on the third of November, it arrived at a creek flowing toward the southwest. This stream was thought to be the St. Mary's River, one of the principal branches of the Maumee River; but it was afterward ascertained to be a branch of the Wabash River. Since it was late in the afternoon and the men were fatigued by the laborious march, they encamped on a commanding piece of ground by

the creek.

"General St. Clair intended to occupy that position until the first regiment arrived with the provisions. According to a plan he had made with Major Ferguson, he intended to begin work on a fort the next day; but he was not permitted to do so. Half an hour before sunrise on the fourth of November, just after the men had been dismissed from parade, the Indians attacked the militiamen posted at the front. By rushing back into camp with the Indians close upon their heels, they threw the army into disorder from which it could not recover. In a short time the Indians were checked by the fire of the first line, but they immediately concentrated a very heavy fire on that line; and in a few minutes they extended their fire to the second line.

"In each case their heaviest fire was directed into the center of the line where the artillery was placed, and men were frequently driven from the center with great slaughter. Bayonets were resorted to in that emergency. Under orders from St. Clair, Colonel Darke made a spirited charge with a part of the second line. The Indians instantly gave way and were driven back several hundred yards. But there was not a sufficient number of riflemen to preserve the advantage, and the enemy soon renewed the attack and forced our troops to retreat.

"When the Indians entered the American camp from the left, another charge was made with great success by the battalions of Majors Butler and Clark. Several other charges were made with equal effect. These attacks, however, caused a heavy loss of men, particularly of officers. In the charge made by the second regiment, Major Butler was dangerously wounded. All but three of the officers of that regiment fell, and one of these three was shot through the body. The cannon was silenced, and all the artillery officers were killed except Captain Ford who was dangerously wounded. Half the army had fallen; it was necessary to gain the road, if possible, and to make a retreat.

"A successful charge was made on the enemy, as if to turn their right flank, but in reality to reach the road. The militia then commenced to retreat, followed by the

United States troops, with Major Clark's battalion covering the rear. The retreat, as might be expected, soon became a flight. The camp was abandoned and so was the artillery for there were no horses to move it. For about four miles the road was almost covered with the arms and accouterments which the men continued to throw away even after the Indians had stopped pursuing them.

"All of General St. Clair's horses had been killed, and he was mounted on a broken-down packhorse that could scarcely be forced out of a walk. It was, therefore, impossible for him to get forward to command a halt; and the orders which he dispatched by others for that purpose were not executed. The rout continued until about dark when the remnant of the army arrived at Fort Jefferson, twenty-seven miles from the battleground. The battle had lasted about three hours; it began a half hour before sunrise, and the retreat did not start until nine-thirty in the morning. With only one exception, the troops behaved with great bravery during this time; this accounts for the very large number of casualties.

"Among those killed were Major General Butler, Colonel Oldham, Major Ferguson, Major Hart, and Major Clark. Among the wounded were Colonel Sargeant (the adjutant general), Colonel Darke, Colonel Gibson, Major Butler, and Viscount Malartie, who served as an aide. In addition to these, the list of officers killed contained the names of Captains Bradford, Phelon, Kirkwood, Price, Van Swearingen, Tipton, Purdy, Smith, Piatt, Gaither, Crebbs, and Newman; Lieutenants Spear, Warren, Boyd, McMath, Burgess, Kelso, Read, Little, Hopper, and Lickins; Ensigns Cobb, Balch, Chase, Turner, Wilson, Brook, Beatty, and Purdy; Quartermasters Reynolds and Ward; Adjutant Anderson; and Dr. Grasson. In addition to the wounded officers whose names are mentioned above, the official list contains the names of Captains Doyle, Truman, Ford, Buchanan, Darke, and Hough; Lieutenants Greaton, Davidson, DeButts, Price, Morgan, McCrea, Lysle, and Thompson; Adjutants Whistler and Crawford; and Ensign Bines. The melancholy result of that disastrous day was felt and lamented by all who had

sympathy for private distress or public misfortune.

"The only allegation made by General St. Clair against his army was that the men lacked discipline, a quality which could not have been developed during the short time the men were in the service. That defect rendered it impossible to restore order once the men were thrown into confusion, and this is the chief reason why the loss fell so heavily on the officers. They were compelled to expose themselves to an unusual degree in their efforts to rally the men and to overcome the want of discipline. Although worn down by sickness and suffering from a painful disease, General St. Clair set the example. It was alleged by the officers that the Indians far outnumbered the American troops. That conclusion was drawn, in part, from the fact that the Indians outflanked and forcefully attacked all sides of the American lines at the same time.

"When the fugitives arrived at Fort Jefferson, the first regiment was just returning from its unsuccessful effort either to overtake the deserters or to meet the convoy of provisions. The absence of that regiment at the time of the battle was believed by some men to have been the cause of the defeat. They supposed that had it been present the Indians would have been defeated or would have attacked at another time. General St. Clair seemed to think it uncertain, judging from the superior number of the enemy, whether he ought to consider the absence of that corps fortunate or otherwise. On the whole, he seemed to think it fortunate, for he gravely doubted whether its presence would have changed the fortune of the day. If it had not, the triumph of the enemy would have been more complete, and the country would have been left without means of defense.

"As soon as the troops reached Fort Jefferson, it became a question of whether they ought to stay there or return to Fort Washington. General St. Clair asked the advice of his surviving field officers; these included Colonel Darke, Majors Hamtramck, Zeigler, and Gaither, and Colonel Sergeant. After discussing the subject, they reported unanimously that they believed the troops could not be accommodated in Fort Jefferson nor could they be supplied with pro-

visions there. The officers thought it proper to proceed immediately toward supplies which were known to be on the road not more than two marches distant. This plan was adopted, and the army set out at ten o'clock and marched all night. The next day they met a convoy with a quantity of flour which was one day ahead of a drove of cattle. These supplies were used by the troops on their march to Fort Washington.

"The loss sustained by the country in the fall of so many gallant officers and men was most seriously regretted. General Butler and Major Ferguson were spoken of with particular esteem. The public feeling, however, was in some measure alleviated by the fact that those brave men, officers and privates, fell covered with honor while defending the cause of their country.

"The principal complaint made by the commander was that some of his orders given during the night to Colonel Oldham were not executed. He also complained that some very important information sent during the night by Captain Hough to General Butler was not imparted to him, and he did not hear of it until he arrived at Fort Washington.

"Because of the almost treasonable negligence of the government agents in furnishing supplies, the army had been on short allowances for many days. This had made it absolutely necessary either to retreat or to send the first regiment, which was the flower of the army, to bring up the provisions and military stores. The latter alternative was chosen, and in the absence of that corps the attack was made. In regard to the negligence of the War Department, it is a well-authenticated fact that boxes and packages were carelessly put up and marked. During the battle a box marked 'flints' was found to contain gunlocks; a keg of powder marked 'for the infantry' was found to be damaged cannon-powder that could scarcely be ignited.

"Under all of these disadvantages, it was generally believed by candid, intelligent men that the commanding general was not justly liable to severe censure. With one exception at the commencement of the action, the troops behaved with great bravery. They maintained their ground

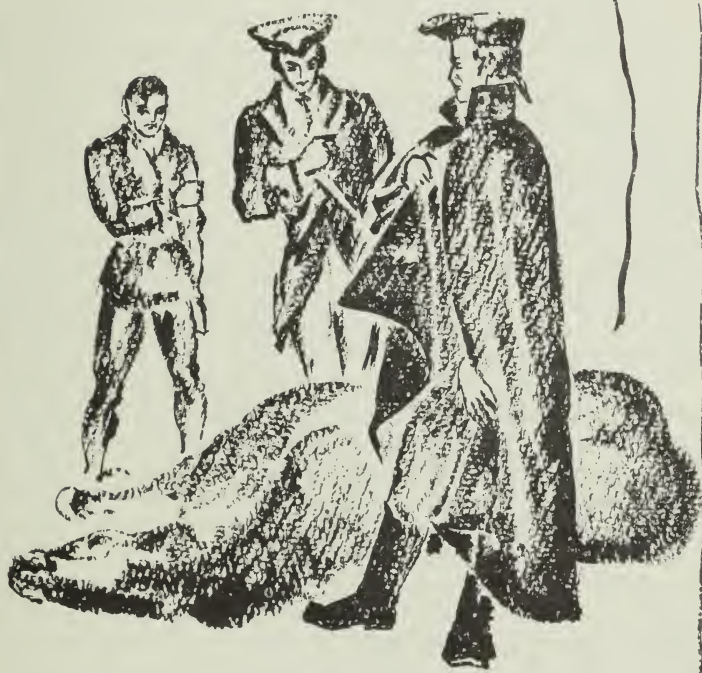
for three hours in an uninterrupted conflict with a superior force. They did not attempt to leave the field until it was covered with the bodies of their companions and a retreat was ordered. The General, less anxious for himself than for others, was the last to leave the ground after he had ordered the retreat.

"For some time after the disaster, St. Clair was universally censured. After a thorough investigation, a committee of Congress, with Mr. Giles of Virginia as chairman, found that the campaign had been conducted with skill and personal bravery. The committee concluded that the defeat was caused chiefly by the lack of discipline in the militia and by the negligence of those whose duty it was to procure and forward the provisions and military stores necessary for the expedition.

"Secretary of War Henry Knox addressed a letter to Congress complaining that an injustice had been done him by the committee. The report was then reconsidered by the same committee. After hearing the statements and explanations of the Secretary and after reconsidering the whole matter, they reaffirmed their first report."

From one part of the country to the other, this defeat caused one loud and merciless outcry of abuse and detestation of St. Clair. Many a general with far less bravery and military skill has, when successful, been applauded by the unthinking multitude with vehement acclamations. The following excerpt from the narrative of St. Clair's campaign shows that he deserved a better fate.

"During the engagement, Generals St. Clair and Butler were continually going up and down the lines; as one general went up one side, the other one went down the opposite side. St. Clair was so severely afflicted with the gout that he was unable to mount or dismount a horse without assistance. His own four horses had been turned out to feed overnight, but they had been brought in before the battle. St. Clair first attempted to ride a young horse, but the animal was so frightened by the firing that it could not be mounted. He had just moved the horse to where he could have some advantage from the slope of the ground when the horse was



the horse was shot through the head

Jack

shot through the head. The boy holding it was wounded in the arm. A second horse was brought and harnessed; but as St. Clair was about to mount, the animal and the servant who held it were killed. The General then ordered the third horse to be prepared and brought to him at the left of the front line, which was then warmly engaged. The man and horse were never heard of afterward, and it is supposed that they were killed. General St. Clair's fourth horse was killed under the Count de Malartie, one of his aides, whose horse had died on the march.

"On the day of the battle, St. Clair was not in his uniform; he wore a coarse coat and a three-cornered hat. A long queue and heavy gray locks flowed from under his beaver hat. Early in the action, a ball grazed the side of his face and cut off a portion of one of his locks. It is said that during the battle eight balls passed through his clothes. After his horses were killed, he exerted himself on foot for a considerable time with a degree of alertness that surprised everybody who saw him. When he was nearly exhausted, a packhorse was brought to him. Although he could scarcely prod the animal out of a walk, he rode it during the remainder of the day. Had he not been furnished with a horse, he would have had to remain on the field, even though he was unhurt.

"During the action General St. Clair exerted himself with a courage and presence of mind worthy of the best fortune. He gave his orders in person to Colonel Darke, and he was present when the first bayonet charge was made upon the enemy. When the Indians first entered the camp by the left flank, General St. Clair led the troops which drove them back. When a retreat became indispensable, he put himself at the head of the troops which broke through the enemy ranks and opened the way for the remainder of the army. When this was done, he remained in the rear and made every exertion to obtain a party to cover the retreat. The panic, however, was so great that his exertions were of little avail. At the height of the action, a few of the men crowded around the fires in the center of the camp; St. Clair was seen drawing his pistols, threatening them, and order-

ing them to turn and repel the enemy. "

In commenting upon the General's honorable acquittal of all blame by the committee of Congress appointed to inquire into the causes of the failure of the expedition, Chief Justice John Marshall, in his LIFE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, remarks with his usual felicity of expression: "More satisfactory testimony in favor of St. Clair is furnished by the circumstance that he still retained the undiminished esteem and good opinion of President Washington. "

To the foregoing description of the battle we extract from the narrative of Major Jacob Fowler his own personal experience in the events of that fatal day. Charles Cist published Fowler's story in his ADVERTISER, with the following introduction:

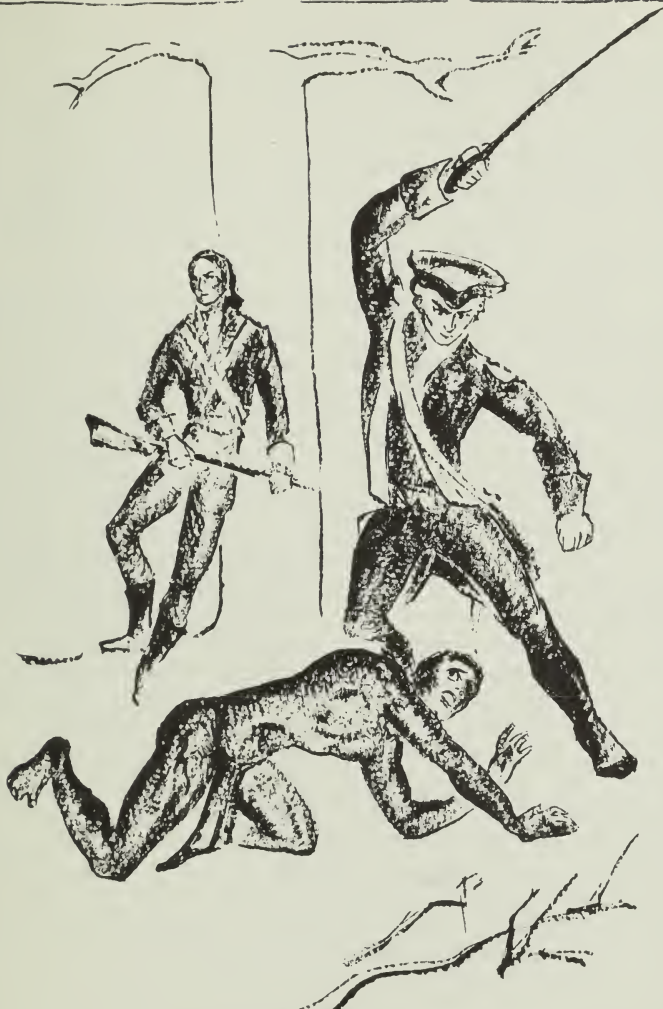
"There was hardly a battle fought in the early struggles with the Indians in which Mr. Fowler did not participate. He is now (July, 1844) eighty years old, but his eye has not dimmed nor his natural force abated. He can still pick off a squirrel with his rifle at one hundred yards. He can walk as firmly and as fast as most men of fifty, and I cannot perceive a gray hair in his head. His mind and memory are as vigorous as his physical body. "

Major Fowler's story is as follows:

"Excepting a single instance, St. Clair kept out no scouting parties during his entire march. We would have been completely surprised by the attack if it had not been for volunteer scouting parties from the militia who were out on the evening before the battle. The constant discharge of rifles throughout the night also warned us to prepare for the event. The militia, encamped about a quarter of a mile in front of the main army, received the first shock of the attack a little after daybreak. The camp was on the bank of a small creek, one of the upper branches of the Wabash River. The ground was nearly level and covered with a heavy growth of timber. As surveyor, I drew the pay and rations of a subaltern; but as an old hunter, I was not disposed to trust myself among the Indians without my rifle. Indeed, I found it very serviceable during the march, for the army never had more than half rations during the whole campaign.

"My stock of bullets had become low from using them for hunting; and as soon as it was daylight that morning, I started for the militia camp to get a ladle to pour some more. By this time the battle had begun, and I met the militia running into the main body of troops. I hailed one of the Kentuckians, whom I found disabled in the right wrist by a bullet; and I asked him if he had bullets to spare. He told me to take out his pouch and to divide with him. I poured out a double handful, put back what I supposed was half, and was about to leave him, when he said, 'Stop, you had better count them.' I could hardly resist the impulse to laugh, for the idea of counting a handful of bullets was ludicrous under the circumstances. 'If we get through this day's scrape, my dear fellow,' said I, 'I will return you twice as many.' But I never saw him again, and I suppose he shared the fate that befell many a gallant spirit on that day. I owe the bullets, at any rate, at this moment.

"When I returned to the lines, I found that the engagement had begun. One of Captain Piatt's men lay shot through the belly near the spot I had left. I saw an Indian behind a small tree not twenty steps away and just outside the regular lines. He was loading his piece, squatting down as much as possible to screen himself. I sighted and shot him through; he dropped as soon as I had fired, and I retreated into our lines to reload my rifle. Finding that the fire had ceased at this point, I ran to the rear line, where I met Colonel Darke leading a charge with about three hundred men. I followed with my rifle. By this movement the Indians were driven out of sight, and the Colonel called a halt to rally his men. A number of trees had been blown down near where we stood. As an experienced woodsman and hunter, I suggested to Colonel Darke that these trees would form an excellent breastwork of sufficient length to protect the whole force. We might yet need that protection, for judging by the shouting and firing, the Indians behind us had closed the gap we had made in charging. I told the Colonel that if we turned and charged the Indians at our rear, we should have them with their backs to us. No doubt we would be able to give a good account of them. 'Lead the way, then,' said the



While he was crawling away

Amly

Colonel, as he rode to the rear to march the whole body forward. We then charged the Indians, but they were so thick that we could do nothing with them. In a few minutes they had surrounded us, and we found ourselves beside the army baggage and the artillery, which had been captured. I then climbed a tree. After firing twelve or fourteen times, two or three rods being my longest shot, I discovered that many of those whom I had struck were not brought down. I had not then had sufficient experience to know that I must shoot them in the hip to bring them down. The unprotected regulars armed with muskets could do little better than to fire at random.

"By this time only about thirty men of Colonel Darke's command were left standing; the rest were lying around us, either killed or wounded. I ran to the Colonel, who was waving his sword in the thickest of it to encourage his men, and told him we should all be down in five minutes if we did not charge. 'Charge, then!' said he to the little line that remained, and they did so. Fortunately, the main army charged on the other side at the same time, and the Indians were momentarily put to flight.

"I had been partially sheltered by a small tree, but two Indians behind a larger tree fired simultaneously at me. Feeling the stream of air following the passage of their shots, I supposed myself cut to pieces; but no harm had been done. I brought my piece to my side and fired without aiming at the one that stood his ground. The fellow was so close to me that I could hardly miss him, and I shot him through the hips. While he was crawling away on all fours, Colonel Darke, who had dismounted and stood close by me, cut off the Indian's head. By this time the cock of my rifle lock had worn loose and gave me much trouble. I told my difficulty to an acquaintance from Cincinnati who had picked up a gun from a militiaman. 'There is a first-rate rifle,' he said, pointing to one at a distance. I ran to get it as soon as I ascertained that my bullets would fit it.

"Here I met Captain J. S. Gano, who was unarmed. I handed him the rifle I had gone into the battle with, and I told him that we were defeated and would have to make our

escape as speedily as possible. If we escaped, we would need the rifles for subsistence in the woods. While the battle still raged, a group of soldiers had gathered together, but they did little more than present targets for the enemy. The soldiers appeared stupefied and bewildered. At another spot a group of soldiers had broken into the officers' marquees and were eating the breakfast from which the officers had been called. It must be remembered that neither officers nor men had eaten anything the whole morning. Some of the men were shot down in the very act of eating.

"Just where I then stood, no Indians were visible, although their rifle balls were striking all around. At last I saw an Indian dash for a tree about forty yards off. From this protection he loaded and fired four times, bringing down his man at every shot. He fired too quickly to give me a chance to aim at him. At length I got a range of two inches inside his backbone and blazed away; down he fell, and I saw no more of him.

"A short time later I heard the cry given by St. Clair and his adjutant sergeant to charge to the road. I ran through the disorganized army to where I had left my relative, Captain Piatt, and I told him that the army was broken up and in full retreat. 'Don't say so,' he replied. 'You will discourage my men, and I can't believe it.' I persisted a short time, but finding him obstinate, I said, 'If you will rush your fate, in God's name do it!' I then ran off toward the rear of the army, which was rapidly retreating.

"Piatt called, 'Wait for me!' It was no use to stop, for by this time the savages were hardly twenty yards behind me. Being uncommonly active in those days, I soon got from the rear to the front of the troops; but I had great trouble in avoiding the bayonets which the retreating men had thrown down with the sharp points toward their pursuers.

"It has been stated that the Indians followed us for thirty miles, but this is not true. My duty as surveyor led me to mark the miles every day we proceeded on our march, and it was therefore easy to ascertain how far we were pursued. The Indians, after every other fire, fell back to load their rifles and regained the lost distance by running on

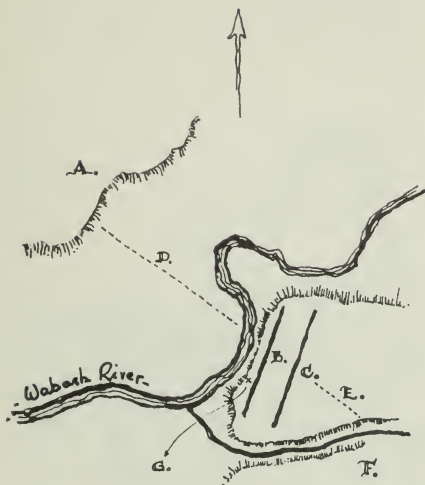
afresh.

"Even during the last charge of Colonel Darke, the bodies of the dead and dying were shrouded with smoke and in the heavy morning frost looked like so many pumpkins in a cornfield in December. It was on the fourth of November, and the day was severely cold for the season. My fingers became so benumbed at times that I had to take the bullets in my mouth and load from it, while I had the wiping rod in my hand to force them down."

The map of the battleground is taken from the survey of John S. Houston of Celina. The localities were pointed out to him by Mr. McDowell, who was in the action and who is now living near Fort Recovery. In a letter headed Celina, March 20, 1847, Mr. Houston reported on a conversation with Mr. McDowell.

"Mr. McDowell states that on the morning of the battle he and several others had just gone out to look after their horses when suddenly they heard discharges of musketry and the most hideous yells from the opposite side of the river. Instantly, he rushed to camp where his regiment was preparing for action. He joined them and gallantly charged the enemy. On the retreat he was among those who defended the rear and kept the enemy in check for several miles. The ground was covered with a slushy snow which greatly retarded their progress. After a while many soldiers became so dispirited and hungry--having eaten no breakfast--that they threw down their arms and made their way as best they could among the retreating crowd.

"About this time, Mr. McDowell saw a mother carrying her year-old infant. She was so tired that she was about to fall by the wayside when he took the child and carried it some distance. Afterward, to save her own life, the woman left the child in the snow. The Indians carried it to the Sandusky towns and reared it. Soon after this, McDowell overtook a youth about eighteen years old who was hobbling along, wounded in the leg. McDowell gave him a drink of spirits and a little bread, although he himself had not had time to eat. This refreshed and encouraged the young man; and when a pony came dashing by, McDowell caught it and



PLAN OF ST. CLAIR'S BATTLEFIELD

REFERENCES:

- A. HIGH GROUND ON WHICH THE MILITIA WERE EN-
CAMPED AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE ACTION.
- B. & C. ENCAMPMENT OF THE MAIN ARMY ———
- D. RETREAT OF THE MILITIA AT THE BEGINNING
OF THE BATTLE ———
- E. ST. CLAIR'S TRACE, ON WHICH THE DEFEATED AR-
MY RETREATED ———
- F. PLACE WHERE GENERAL BUTLER AND OTHER OF-
FICERS WERE BURIED ———
- G. SITE OF FORT RECOVERY, BUILT BY WAYNE ———

from Historical Collections of Ohio by Howe.

mounted the young soldier upon it. In this way the youth reached the fort safely.

"At Stillwater Creek, twelve miles from the battleground, the Indians gave up the pursuit and returned to share the booty. 'Oh!' said an old squaw who died many years ago on the St. Mary's River, 'my arm that night was weary scalping white man.'

"'Some years ago,' McDowell said to me (and here his cheeks became moistened with tears), 'I was traveling in Kentucky to visit a sister I had not seen in many years. When I arrived at Georgetown, I entered my name on the hotel register with the place of my residence--Fort Recovery, Ohio.

"'After I had been sitting some time at ease before a comfortable fire, a gentleman who had noticed the entry of my name and residence opened a friendly conversation about the place and country. He soon remarked that he was at the defeat of St. Clair, and that if it had not been for the assistance of a young man of Butler's regiment, he would have been there yet.'

"After a few more questions and replies, both men recognized each other. The gentleman was the youth who had been shot during the retreat and whose life had been saved with McDowell's assistance. At this discovery their surprise and consequent mutual attachment may be imagined. The gentleman insisted upon taking McDowell home and introducing him to his wife and daughters. He had become a wealthy merchant and gave McDowell a new suit of clothes and other presents which he has carefully preserved to this day."

In his SKETCHES OF WESTERN ADVENTURE, John A. McClung relates some anecdotes which show the heroism and activity of a young man who was in this action.

"The late William Kennan, of Fleming County, when a young man of eighteen, was attached to the corps of rangers who accompanied the regular force. He had long been noted for his strength and activity. In the course of the march from Fort Washington, he had repeated opportunities to test his astonishing physical powers; and it was univer-



mounted the young soldier

Arch.

sally admitted that he was the swiftest runner in the light corps. On the evening preceding the action, his corps had been advanced a few hundred yards in front of the first line of infantry in order to give reasonable notice of the enemy's approach. Just as day was dawning, he observed about thirty Indians within one hundred yards of the guards' fire. They advanced cautiously toward the spot where he stood with about twenty rangers; the other men were considerably in the rear.

"Supposing it to be a mere scouting party, numbering no more than the rangers, he sprang forward a few paces in order to shelter himself in a spot of rank grass. After firing with a quick aim upon the foremost Indian, Kennan instantly fell flat upon his face and proceeded with all possible rapidity to reload his gun. He did not doubt for a moment that the rangers would maintain their positions and support him. The Indians, however, rushed forward in such overwhelming numbers that the rangers were compelled to run. Kennan was in total ignorance of his danger until his captain, who had observed him when he threw himself into the grass, suddenly shouted, 'Run, Kennan! or you are a dead man!' Instantly, Kennan sprang to his feet and beheld Indians within ten feet of him; his company was already more than one hundred yards in front.

"Not a moment was to be lost. He darted off with every muscle strained to its utmost. A dozen yelling Indians were close behind him. At first he pressed straight forward to the ford in the creek which separated the rangers from the main army. Several Indians, who had passed him before he rose from the grass, threw themselves in the way and completely cut him off from the other rangers. By the most powerful exertions, he left all of the pursuers behind him, with the exception of one chief who displayed a swiftness and perseverance equal to his own. The circuit which Kennan was obliged to take extended the race for more than four hundred yards. The distance between them was about eighteen feet, which Kennan could not increase nor his adversary diminish. Each runner put his whole soul into the race.

"Kennan, as far as he was able, kept his eye upon the motions of his pursuer, for he was afraid the Indian would throw the tomahawk which he held aloft in a menacing position. At length, finding that no other Indian was immediately at hand, Kennan determined to try the mettle of his pursuer in a different manner. He felt for his own tomahawk but discovered it had slipped out of its sheath while he lay in the grass. His hair almost lifted the cap from his head when he realized he was totally unarmed! Kennan had slackened his pace for a moment, and the Indian was almost in reach of him when he again sprinted forward. Fear lent wings to his feet, and for the first time he saw himself outdistancing the Indian. He had watched the motions of his pursuer too closely, however, to pay proper attention to the nature of the ground before him; and he suddenly found himself in front of a large tree which had been blown down. Brush and other impediments increased the height of the obstacle to eight or nine feet.

"The Indian, who heretofore had not uttered the slightest sound, now gave a short, quick yell as if sure of his victim. Kennan had not a moment to deliberate. He must clear the tree at a leap or perish. Putting his whole soul into the effort, he bounded into the air with a power that astonished himself. Clearing limbs, brush, and everything else, he alighted in perfect safety on the other side. A loud yell of astonishment burst from his pursuer, who had not the hardihood to attempt the same feat. Kennan, as may be readily imagined, had no leisure to enjoy his triumph but dashed into the bed of the creek. With its high banks shielding him from the fire of the enemy, he ran up the stream until he found a convenient place to cross. Soon he rejoined the rangers in the rear of the encampment. He was panting from the fatigue of exertions which have seldom been surpassed, but no breathing time was allowed him. The attack instantly commenced and, as we have already observed, was maintained for three hours with unabated fury.

"When the retreat commenced, Kennan was attached to Major Clark's battalion which was assigned the task of protecting the rear. This corps quickly lost its commander



he alighted in perfect safety

End.

and was completely disorganized. Kennan was among the hindmost when the fight commenced; but by exerting those same powers which had saved him in the morning, he quickly gained the front and passed several horsemen in the flight. Here he beheld a private of his own company, an intimate acquaintance, lying upon the ground with his thigh broken. In the most piercing tones of distress, the wounded man implored each horseman who hurried by to take him up behind him. As soon as he beheld Kennan coming on foot, he stretched out his arms and called aloud for help. Notwithstanding the imminent peril of the moment, Kennan could not reject so passionate an appeal and carried him for several hundred yards. Horseman after horseman passed them, but each rider refused to take the wounded man.

"At length the enemy was gaining upon them so fast that Kennan saw their deaths to be certain unless he relinquished his burden. Accordingly, he told his friend that he had used every possible exertion to save his life and that he must relax his hold around his neck or they would both perish. The unhappy man, heedless of every remonstrance, still clung convulsively and impeded Kennan's exertions until the foremost of the enemy, armed with tomahawk alone, was within twenty yards of them. Kennan then drew his knife from its sheath and cut the fingers of his companion. The unhappy man rolled upon the ground in utter helplessness. He was tomahawked before Kennan had gone thirty yards. Relieved of his burden, Kennan darted forward with a speed which once more brought him to the front. Here again he was compelled to neglect his own safety in order to attend to that of others.

"The late Governor George Madison of Kentucky, who afterward commanded the troops who defended themselves so honorably at Raisin River, was a man of amiable temper and unconquerable courage. At that time, he was a subaltern in St. Clair's army. His health was poor; and now, totally exhausted by the exertions of the morning, he was calmly sitting on a log awaiting the approach of his enemies. Kennan hastily accosted him and inquired the cause of his delay. Madison, pointing to a wound which had bled pro-

fusely, replied that he was unable to walk any farther and that he had no horse. Kennan instantly ran back to a spot where he had seen an exhausted horse grazing and caught it without difficulty. Having assisted Madison to mount, he walked beside the animal until they were out of danger. Fortunately, the pursuit soon ceased, as the plunder of the camp presented irresistible attractions to the enemy. The friendship thus formed between these two young men endured without interruption for the rest of their lives. Kennan never entirely recovered from the severe exertions which he had been compelled to make during this unfortunate expedition. He settled in Fleming County where he was a leading member of the Baptist church for many years. He died in 1827."

The number of Indians engaged in this action can never be ascertained with any degree of certainty. Estimates have varied from one to three thousand. Colonel John Johnston, long an Indian agent in this region, had many opportunities to form a correct opinion on this subject. His statements in a letter of 1846 are worthy of consideration.

"The number of Indians at the defeat of St. Clair must have been large. At that time game was plentiful, and a large number of Indians could have subsisted easily. Wells, one of our interpreters, was there and fought for the enemy. To use his own language, he tomahawked and scalped the wounded, dying, and dead, until he was unable to raise his arm. The principal tribes in the battle were the Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandot, Miami, and Ottawa. A few Indians of the Chippewa and Potawatomi tribes were also present. I had no accurate means of knowing the total number, but it could not have been less than two thousand."

Some time after the defeat of St. Clair, General Wilkinson, who had become commander of Fort Washington, ordered an expedition to visit the battleground. Captain Buntin, who was with the party, afterward wrote a letter to St. Clair from which the following is extracted.

"In my opinion, those unfortunate men who were captured alive suffered the greatest torture by having their limbs torn off. The women were treated with the most indecent cruelty; stakes as thick as a person's arm were driven

through their bodies. The former I observed while burying the dead; the latter was discovered by Colonel Sargeant and Dr. Brown. We found three carriages whole; the other five were so badly damaged that they were useless. By the General's orders, we dug pits in different places and buried all the bodies that were exposed to view or that could be found conveniently.

"During this time several small parties were detached --some to protect the main group and others to examine the course of the creek. At some distance in front of the ground occupied by the militia, these parties found a large camp, not less than three quarters of a mile long. They thought it had been the camp of the Indians the night before the action. We remained on the field that night, and the next morning we hitched horses to the carriages and started for Fort Jefferson.

"There is little reason to believe that the enemy carried off the cannons, and it is thought they were either buried or thrown into the creek. I think the latter more probable, but as it was frozen over with thick ice and covered with a deep snow, it was impossible to make a search with any prospect of success. I have mentioned the camp occupied by the enemy the night before the action. Could Colonel Oldham have complied with your orders on that evening, things at this day might have worn a different aspect."

Mr. McDowell, previously mentioned, was one of those who visited the battleground. He stated that although the bodies were much abused and stripped of everything of any value, they were recognized and interred in four large graves. General Butler was found in the shattered remains of his tent. After he had been wounded, he was carried to the tent; while two surgeons were dressing his wounds, a ball struck one of them in the hip. At that instant, an Indian, who was determined to have Butler's scalp, rushed in. While attempting to scalp the General, he was shot by the dying surgeon.

In December, 1793, General Wayne arrived with his army at Greenville and sent forward a detachment to the spot of St. Clair's Defeat. They arrived on Christmas Day

and pitched their tents on the battlebround. Before the men could make their beds in their tents that night, they had to gather the bones together and carry them out. The next day graves were dug and the bones remaining above ground were buried. Six hundred skulls were among them. The flesh was entirely off the bones, but in many cases the sinews yet held them together. After this melancholy duty was performed, a fortification was built and named Fort Recovery in commemoration of its being recovered from the Indians who had been in possession of the ground since 1791. On the completion of the fort, one company of artillerymen and one of riflemen were left there; the others returned to Greenville.

Henry Howe, HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF OHIO (Cincinnati: Published by the state of Ohio, 1908), Vol. II, pp. 223-32.

The terrible battle known as St. Clair's Defeat was fought on the morning of November 4, 1791, in what is now the northwestern part of Darke County, Ohio, near the Indiana boundary. Early in the preceding spring General St. Clair had received orders to raise and organize an army, to march into the wilderness as far as the junction of the St. Mary's and the St. Joseph rivers, and to establish a line of military posts from Fort Washington at Cincinnati to the present site of Fort Wayne. The forts were intended to keep the Indians in wholesome dread of the power of the whites and to prevent those fearful depredations which had already done so much to check the advancing tide of civilization. In the execution of these orders, St. Clair surmounted many serious obstacles. After building Forts Hamilton and Jefferson, he reached a branch of the Wabash and encamped there in supposed security on the evening of the third of November. His army numbered between two and three thousand men. Several hundred women and children, the families of the soldiers, traveled with the army.

St. Clair's great and fatal mistake was in his fancied security. Instead of having a large number of experienced scouts to scour the wilderness far in advance of the main army and to warn him of danger, he marched blindly forward as if passing through friendly territory. The Indians proved themselves more circumspect, for their scouts and runners had not been idle and had brought their leaders intelligence of the whites. To check and punish what they regarded as an invasion of their territory, the Indians collected a great force and marched forward to battle with their enemies. Because of the American commander's neglect, these dusky sons of the forest were enabled to concoct their plans without suspicion, to arrange their attack without detection, and to carry out their designs with the most terrible effect.

About half an hour before sunrise on the fourth of November, the Indians fiercely attacked the militia posted in front of the main army. The first ranks made a slight resistance and then fell back in wild disorder to the main camp. The overwhelming force of savages, led by their most distinguished chiefs, came rushing on with yells of fury, cre-

ating panic and confusion impossible to describe. Then began a desperate fight and a fearful slaughter. Though taken completely by surprise, the brave soldiers seized their arms, rallied under their respective leaders, and stood their ground like heroes. Their first regular fire checked the onset of the foe to some degree, but the Indians were too great in numbers and held too great an advantage to give way permanently. In a short time our gallant soldiers were violently assailed on all sides, and officers and men went down before the deadly rifle fire like leaves before the blasts of autumn wind. Several charges were ordered and made with great spirit. The savages at times gave way before the impetuous charges of their disciplined foes, yet it was only to rally in greater force and to press more fearfully upon some weaker point.

For three hours the battle raged with wild fury, and the ground everywhere was covered with the dead and dying. General St. Clair saw with dismay that the day was hopelessly lost. Four of his own horses had already been killed, his clothes were riddled with bullets, and nearly every officer had been cut down. Under these distressing circumstances, there was but one thing for him to do. He gave the order to retreat.

This retreat, as might have been anticipated, soon became a rout of the most terrible kind. The Indians, finding themselves masters of the field and finding their enemies flying in wild disorder, rushed after the fugitives with yells of triumph. They followed the soldiers for four or five miles, shooting, tomahawking, or scalping all they could overtake. Then the most eager of the savages, satisfied with their morning's work, gave up the chase and returned to the battlefield to gather the scalps of the dead and dying. Nearly all of the wounded were butchered. Those unfortunate ones who had been taken unharmed were generally reserved for later tortures, and there were enough captives to provide many holidays for the different tribes.

We have thus given a brief sketch of the disaster on that woeful day. The details of that horrifying scene of conflict would fill volumes. This we cannot do. We can, how-

ever, piece together a narrative from the records of the actors in that dreadful tragedy. It is our purpose to publish the story of Robert Branshaw, a Kentuckian, who has left behind him an account of what he saw and did on that memorable day.

"The main camp was pitched in a level wood by a small stream which was one of the branches of the Wabash River; on higher ground about a quarter of a mile across this stream, the militia and a company of rangers had been on duty through the latter part of the night and were prepared for an attack by Indians whom we knew to be in front of us. We supposed them to be a mere scouting party sent out to gather information about our movements. We did not think that they planned anything more serious than to pick off some of our number and to get a few scalps if they could do so without serious risk. Certain it is, we were not prepared for what took place.

"In the gray of the morning, before objects had become distinct at any considerable distance, I was standing near one of the fires conversing with a comrade. Suddenly I saw twenty or thirty painted savages dodging around among the trees in front of us, as if they planned to attack by surprise. Supposing the ones I saw to be the entire party, and thinking it a good chance to bring down one of them and at the same time to alarm the camp, I instantly raised my rifle to my eye, took a quick aim, and dropped the nearest Indian. The smoke had not cleared away from my rifle when a terrific volley was poured in upon us. It was accompanied by appalling yells from a thousand throats. At the same instant I saw Indians springing from behind their covers and rushing down upon us in overwhelming numbers. Instantly, I turned to fly and stumbled over the dead body of the comrade with whom I had been conversing. He had been shot through the temples, and he was the first dead man I saw on that fatal day.

"As we fell back, the militiamen behind us discharged their pieces at the approaching savages; then they turned and fled in the wildest alarm through the little hollow back toward the main camp. Many of them never reached it, for

by this time the Indians were firing rapidly from all sides and were following up the advantage with their murderous tomahawks and scalping knives. All the while, they were screeching with such appalling effect that I believe some of our men, who might otherwise have escaped, became bewildered, stupefied, and lost.

"As for myself, I had some very narrow escapes. Although I was a pretty good runner, I had been singled out by an ambitious young warrior, who, in a race of about two hundred yards, had almost caught up with me. With a good reach of his arm, he might have sunk his tomahawk in the back of my head. A glance over my shoulder showed him about to strike, and instinctively I threw myself down to avoid the blow. As fortune would have it, he struck his foot against one of mine and pitched headlong over me. His weapon flew from his grasp. Before he could recover himself, I was upon him, driving my hunting knife through his throat and severing his jugular vein.

"As I again sprang to my feet, I beheld three other savages close at hand, bounding toward me with yells of rage. I had no hope of escaping from them; but still I ran, straining every nerve to its utmost. Fortunately, they were not as fleet-footed as the one I had killed, and to my unspeakable joy, I found that I was outdistancing them. Each Indian carried a gun in his hand, but I had thrown mine away during my first race. This probably gave me some advantage. Seeing that they could not overtake me, they suddenly stopped; one of them took deliberate aim and fired. The ball sung loudly in my ear, the outer portion of which felt as if it were touched with a live coal. A small portion of my ear had been shot away.

"As I neared the creek, I discovered another small party of Indians in front of me. Turning quickly to the left, I crossed the stream at a bend thirty or forty rods higher up; and by making a broad circuit, I came into camp from the right.

"Here I found a scene of the wildest confusion. Two or three hundred women and children were gathered together in a state of excitement bordering on distraction. Some



I was upon him

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were running to and fro, wringing their hands and shrieking out their terrors; some were standing speechless, like statues of horror, with their hands clasped and their eyes fixed upon the not very distant scene of strife; some were kneeling and calling on Heaven for protection; some were sobbing and groaning in each other's arms; and several who had swooned from fright lay as if dead upon the ground.

"I did not tarry even to answer the questions that many eager voices put to me but hurried forward to the raging battle. As yet I had no rifle, but I soon supplied myself with one from an old comrade who had been shot through the heart. Thinking I could do quite as well alone as by attaching myself to any company, I hastened to a tree that looked suitable for my purpose. I began to load and fire as fast as possible, and I brought down a savage with nearly every shot.

"I wish I could describe that battle, but I lack the power. As I look back on it now, it seems like a wild, horrible dream, in which whites and savages, friends and foes, were all mixed in mad confusion. They melted away in smoke, fire, and blood, amid groans, shouts, shrieks, yells, clashing steel, and exploding firearms.

"I fired eleven shots and had the grim satisfaction of seeing nine savages go down before my aim; four of them fell within ten feet of me. While I was loading for the twelfth time, a ball struck my right wrist and fractured the bone. I dropped to the ground and bound my wound as well as I could. Finding that I could be of no further use where I was, I started for the rear, feeling weak and faint. I had eaten nothing that morning, which was the case with nearly all of the army. On my way to the center of the camp, I met pale, frightened men running in all directions. Numerous dead bodies, some of them scalped and presenting ghastly spectacles, proved that many of the Indians had been there before me. Wounded soldiers called to me and begged for help and water. But I could do nothing for them, and I hurried on. When I came within sight of the spot where the women and children had been collected, I beheld a large body of Indians busy at their work of slaughter. Turning in another direction, I ran down the road.

"Fortunately, I caught a horse that had lost its rider, and with a good deal of difficulty I succeeded in mounting. There were many fugitives running in the trail ahead of me; and I rode after them, passing some in my flight. In this way I escaped before the order to retreat was given; and I was spared the painful sight of seeing the whole army in flight, with the victorious savages in hot pursuit, butchering at every step.

"I succeeded in reaching Fort Jefferson, twenty-two miles from the battlefield. I fainted as soon as I found myself in a place of safety. The remnant of the army arrived about dark, and nothing was heard that night but sounds of lamentation and woe. Subsequently my arm was amputated. My career as a soldier ended with that disastrous day, in which nearly a thousand gallant men and two or three hundred women and children had been killed or wounded. Oh, woeful, woeful day!"

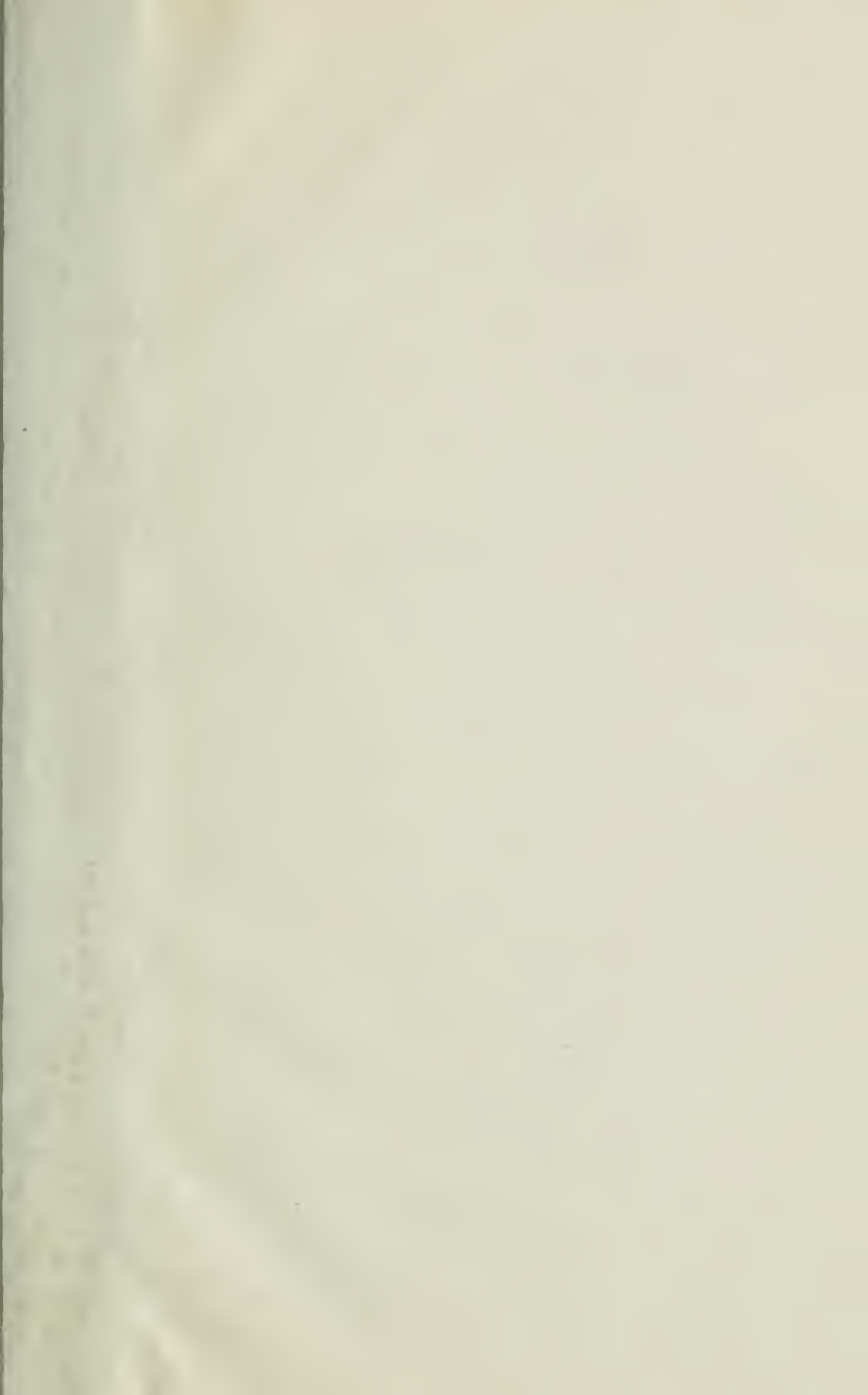
INDIANA HERALD, April 13, 1864

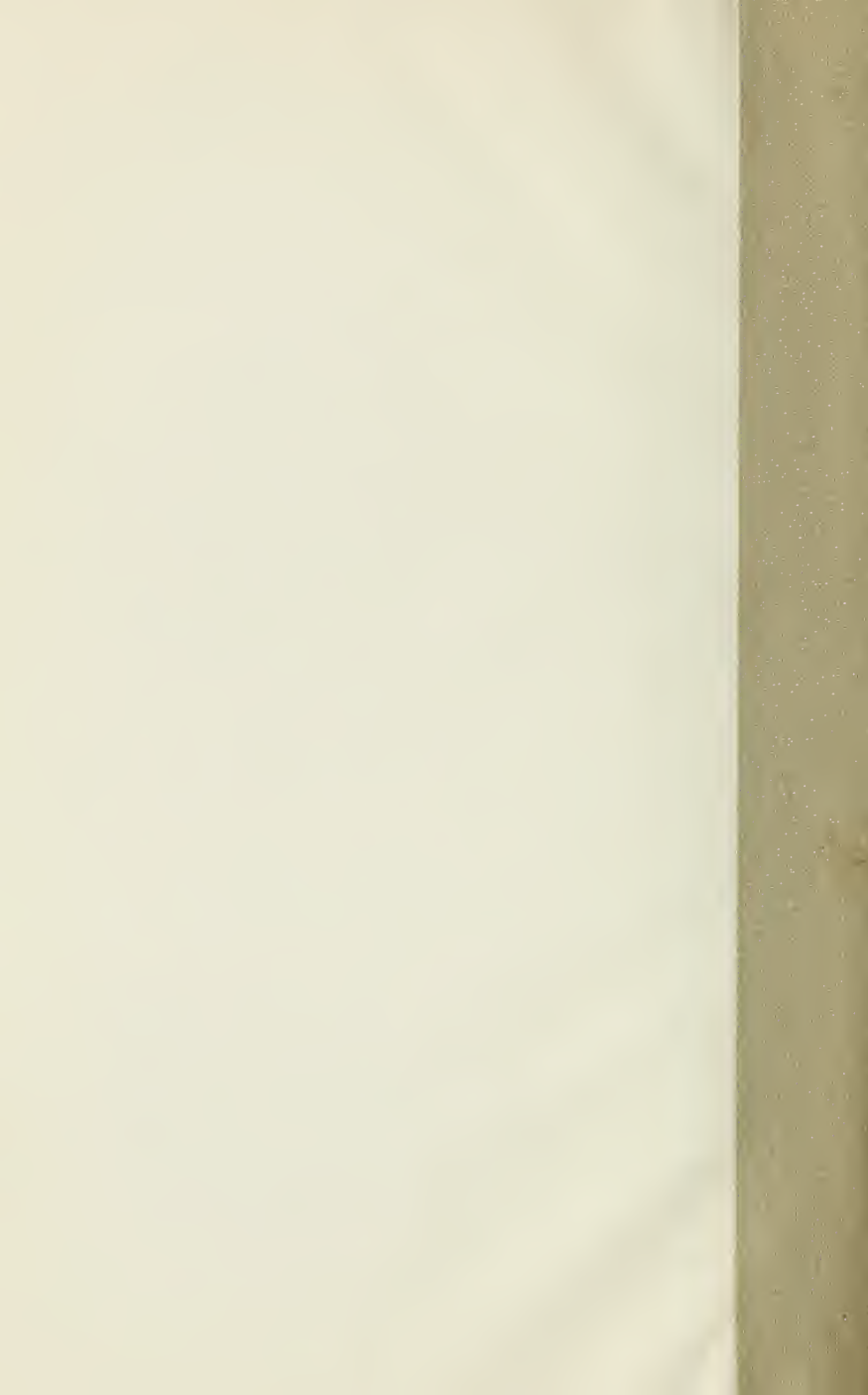
The ceremony of reburying the remains of the soldiers slain at the site of Fort Recovery during St. Clair's Defeat took place on September 24. When we arrived there the preceding afternoon, the hotels and many of the private houses were crowded to overflowing. People continued to arrive throughout the night and until noon the next day. The number who attended was variously estimated at from five to seven thousand, and it was impossible to make a closer estimate. Two thousand persons formed a procession. The sons and the grandsons of those who were to be carried to their last resting place were present.

The occasion was one of solemn import. If these bones had heretofore been neglected, it was only through ignorance of the spot where they lay. Now that mere chance had exposed the grave, the citizens were enthusiastically paying that respect which is due from every true and patriotic American. These men died to maintain liberty and the peace and quiet of the fireside. There were some old gray-haired veterans present with recollections of the defeat vividly stamped upon their memories.

The bones were placed in thirteen coffins, representing the thirteen original states. They were buried in one large grave in the village cemetery. Peace to their ashes. Beneath the sod in one common grave lie the bones of officers, soldiers, and citizens. May their memory live in the heart of every American.

INDIANA STATE JOURNAL, September 27, 1851







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ST. CLAIR'S DEFEAT. FORT WAYNE



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